

N.R.A. Cancels Convention in Columbus Because of Ban

By [JAMES DAO](#) [The New York Times](#)

COLUMBUS, Ohio, July 18 - Looking to punish this city for enacting a ban on assault weapons, the National Rifle Association announced on Monday that it had canceled plans to hold its national convention here in 2007, an event that was expected to pump more than \$15 million into the local economy.

"Thanks to the Columbus City Council, 65,000 people will not be coming to your wonderful Greater Columbus Convention Center in 2007," Wayne LaPierre, the rifle association's executive vice president, said in a news conference here. "The only thing the City Council can expect out of their decision is the gratitude of those businesses in the city we go to instead."

The announcement came five days after Mayor Michael Coleman signed legislation outlawing the sale of certain kinds of military-style semiautomatic weapons and requiring people who purchased such guns before the law's effective date, Aug. 12, to register them with the police.

Columbus officials and gun control groups condemned the rifle association's decision, calling it an effort not only to embarrass the Council but also to bully the State Legislature into passing a bill that would invalidate the Columbus ban and prohibit other cities from enacting similar measures. A Republican lawmaker is expected to introduce such legislation this fall.

"What we saw today was a heavy-handed attempt to dictate policy," Mr. Coleman said at City Hall on Monday afternoon. "That might work in Washington, but it's not going to work in Columbus."

The rifle association's action was also its opening foray into the 2006 race for governor, in which Mr. Coleman plans to run in the Democratic primary against Representative Ted Strickland, who voted against a federal assault weapon ban in 1994 and has been endorsed by the rifle association in recent years.

Though Mr. LaPierre declined to say whether the rifle association's powerful political action committee would support a candidate in the Democratic primary, he made it clear that he believed Mr. Coleman's signature on the assault weapon ban would hurt him in next year's election.

"It's simply bad politics to be on the wrong side of the Second Amendment at election time," Mr. LaPierre said, asserting that Vice President Al Gore lost the 2000 presidential election because he supported gun control, including a federal ban on assault weapons. The Republican-controlled Congress allowed that law to expire last September.

In an interview, Mr. Strickland called the rifle association's decision "consistent with their position," adding that he would not have supported the ban. "I'm weary of issues that polarize people," he said.

Supporters of the Columbus law, including the police officers union, said they pushed for a local ban in response to the expiration of the federal law. They said that the Columbus police had confiscated larger numbers of military-style weapons in recent

years from criminals, including a murder suspect who wounded a police officer in a fierce gun battle last year.

"We need anything that puts another tool in our belt to keep weapons out of criminals' hands," said Detective Daniel R. Jones, the officer who was wounded in that firefight and has lost hearing in one ear.

The weapon that injured Detective Jones was a fully automatic AK-47 rifle that was illegal even before Columbus enacted its ban on assault weapons, the police said.

Gun control advocates said the Columbus assault weapon ban improved on the expired federal law by providing a more detailed description of proscribed weapons, listing components like thumbholes in stocks that could serve as pistol grips, detachable magazines that could be removed without tools and muzzle brakes that reduced recoil. Those descriptions close loopholes in the federal law that allowed manufacturers to make slight adjustments to semiautomatic weapons and circumvent the ban, gun control advocates said.

A Columbus city councilman, Michael Mentel, a sponsor of the law, said the rifle association knew months ago that the city was considering a ban, and he called its decision to pull the convention out of Columbus "a ruse" intended to make a national case against gun control.

Mr. LaPierre denied that, saying that the rifle association decided to move the event only after its lawyers decided the Columbus law would prevent vendors from exhibiting many of their wares at the huge gun show that was to be the convention's main attraction. He said the association would announce within two weeks where it planned to hold its 2007 convention.

He added that the rifle association would consider holding a future convention in Columbus if state lawmakers passed a bill invalidating the Columbus ban and preempting local governments from passing similar measures. Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton and Toledo already have similar bans in place, gun control advocates said.

More than 40 states have enacted such pre-emption laws, many of them as a result of N.R.A. lobbying. But Ohio has a long tradition, enshrined in its Constitution, of giving municipalities wide latitude to set local policies. As a result, any effort to stop cities from enacting gun restrictions would almost certainly face court challenges, gun control advocates said.

Aides to Mr. Coleman said they would try to counter the rifle association's attacks on him by portraying the mayor as a crime fighter whose main goal has been to take weapons away from criminals. They also suggested that Mr. Coleman's support for an assault weapon ban might help him among more liberal Democratic primary voters.

"People support common-sense restrictions on guns," said Steve Campbell, Mr. Coleman's campaign manager.